

Bennett apologizes for email linking fascists, enviro group; Gov't rep should keep open mind, Sierra Club says

Austin, Ian . Austin, Ian.

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ABSTRACT

Sierra Club executive director George Heyman said Bennett's comments demonstrate a personal bias in a sensitive ministry where environmental effects must be weighed when energy projects are proposed.

FULL TEXT

B.C. Energy Minister Bill Bennett has once again forgotten the first rule of emailing: Never put anything in an email you don't want to see on the front page of a newspaper.

Bennett's latest electronic misadventure -- sent out to constituents -- labels environmentalists in the Flathead Valley as "eco-fascists," a crude Second World War reference that has upset environmentalists.

"We either stand strong together against the loss of the Flathead Valley to the eco fascists [sic], or we will lose the Flathead," Bennett emailed supporters. "I am there, if you are there."

Sierra Club executive director George Heyman said Bennett's comments demonstrate a personal bias in a sensitive ministry where environmental effects must be weighed when energy projects are proposed.

"As a minister, Mr. Bennett needs to be able to sit down with groups like the Sierra Club with an open mind," said Heyman.

"His comments demonstrate that his mind is not currently open."

When the email furor erupted, Bennett issued the following:

"The Flathead Valley is a beautiful part of our province that my constituents and the residents of my home region have been recreating in for over 100 years.

"I have strong feelings around the importance of protecting those recreational opportunities like fishing, hunting and camping in the Flathead.

"While I did not personally send this email, I accept full responsibility for it . . ."

Bennett's been through this before.

In 2007, Bennett lost his cabinet post -- minister of mines -- by making some unministerial remarks to a "green" constituent who backed turning the Flathead into a park.

"Let me be very direct with you as you were with me," Bennett emailed in reply to the park backer, who Bennett learned was a landed U.S. immigrant.

"You are an American so I don't give a s---what your opinion is on Canada or Canadian residents," Bennett began in his career-changing email.

Heyman said both emails demonstrate a rush to judgment: "It's a continual pattern of rash behaviour."

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Credit: Ian Austin; The Province

DETAILS

Location:	Flathead Valley
Company / organization:	Name: Sierra Club; NAICS: 813312
Publication title:	The Province; Vancouver, B.C.
First page:	A.9
Publication year:	2010
Publication date:	Jul 15, 2010
Section:	News
Publisher:	Postmedia Network Inc.
Place of publication:	Vancouver, B.C.
Country of publication:	Canada
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--Canada
Source type:	Newspaper
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	613414350
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/canadiannews/newspapers/bennett-apologizes-email-linking-fascists-enviro/docview/613414350/sem-2?accountid=14656
Copyright:	Copyright CanWest Digital Media Jul 15, 2010
Last updated:	2017-11-17
Database:	Canadian Newsstream Collection

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